

Chemical cleanup

DEC hands over reins to EPA at Westwood plant

By Christian M. Wade
Times Herald-Record
cwade@th-record.com

Town of Wallkill – The Environmental Protection Agency has taken over the cleanup of an abandoned chemical plant in the Town of Wallkill, a spokesman said yesterday.

Westwood Chemical, which produced antiperspirant ingredients and chemicals used in water treatment, closed its plant on Tower Drive several months ago, leaving behind thousands of gallons of corrosive chemicals in holding tanks and drums.

"We have taken over the cleanup, and, at this point, we're removing chemicals and testing the plant for contamination levels," said Jim Haklar, an EPA spokesman.

He said the EPA has not yet determined if the plant will be declared a Superfund site, a

move that would add the plant to a national register of hazardous waste sites.

Meanwhile, the state Attorney General's Office in Albany is conducting a criminal investigation of the now-bankrupt chemical company for environmental violations at its Wallkill plant, a spokeswoman with Eliot Spitzer's office confirmed yesterday.

The toxic mess at Westwood was discovered by the town's code enforcer, Walter Barrett, who inspected the plant after learning that the company had closed.

He found open containers of powdered sulfuric acid and 55-gallon drums of corrosives, some of them open and exposed to the elements, littering the facilities.

At the town's request, the state Department of Environmental Conservation was called to the site to take stock of the chemi-

cals left behind. After removing some of the volatile chemicals at the plant, the DEC turned the cleanup over to the EPA.

The company used a variety of chemicals, such as hydrochloric and sulfuric acids, to produce aluminum chlorohydrate, the active ingredient in deodorants.

Westwood had a troubled history.

About 8,000 gallons of hazardous hydrochloric acid spilled there in 1988. In May 1990, more than 200 gallons of nonhazardous aluminum chlorohydrate solution splashed across 100 yards of parking lot and poured onto nearby Tower Drive. A few months later, a 20,000-gallon chemical storage tank inside the plant burst, spilling its contents onto the warehouse floor, parking lot and a nearby street.

The town forced the plant to shut down for a month while the spill was cleaned up.

